

Substitute Senate Bill 5677 - Implementing Federal Welfare Reform

*A brief history and summary of the amended bill as it passed out of the
Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee on 2/14/97*

Congress recently passed the “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act,” profoundly changing the provision of public assistance in the United States. This Act ends the federal entitlement to benefits known as *Aid to Families with Dependent Children* (AFDC), and replaces it with a new program called *Temporary Assistance to Needy Families* (TANF). Essentially, the Act eliminated the legal entitlement to assistance, made welfare temporary, and changed the focus from eligibility for benefits to a requirement to participate in work activities. With some exceptions, a person may receive assistance for a maximum of five years during their lifetime.

The Act gave states significant flexibility in design and implementation of programs for the poor, through the use of block grant funds. While some provisions, such as license suspension for nonpayment of child support, are required by the act, numerous other provisions are optional for states. As a result, Washington State is presented with the opportunity of redesigning how public assistance is provided to those in need.

Substitute Senate Bill 5677, sponsored by Senator Deccio, includes a variety of provisions designed to implement federal welfare reform.

- Welfare applicants who move to Washington State are limited for one year to the amount of cash assistance they would have received in their prior state of residence, if lower.
- TANF recipients are generally required to search for work and participate in a variety of “work activities” as a condition of benefit receipt. “Work activities” include: unsubsidized and subsidized employment, on-the-job training, job search, vocational education, and community work, among others.
- Job services are obtained by recipients, using a voucher system. A variety of providers, including public agencies, can assist those on TANF in seeking work. Outcome measures and performance standards are used to evaluate providers and agency performance.
- For teen parents on TANF assistance, living in an approved, adult supervised setting, and continuing high school or GED preparation is a condition of benefit receipt. Grandparents of infants born to unmarried, unemployed teens needing welfare are liable for support of the teen and the infant.
- Low income child care, on a sliding fee scale, is provided to those on TANF as well as parents who meet poverty criteria for assistance.

- Children who are subject to loss of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits are assisted with state funds.
- The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) seeks federal funding by reducing illegitimacy without increasing abortion, and by applying for federal abstinence program funds. Legislative oversight of the abstinence education program is provided.
- Driver's licenses, business, occupational, professional and recreational licenses are suspended for nonpayment of child support.
- Immigrants are affected in several ways, including: Those on SSI are transferred to the general assistance (GAU) program. Legal immigrants continue eligibility for food stamps, Medicaid and TANF while being facilitated in the naturalization process. Federal sponsor-deeming standards apply to newly-arriving immigrants. If the sponsor dies, certain immigrants will receive medical assistance. Seasonal workers' income is averaged, when determining eligibility for assistance. Undocumented immigrants continue prenatal care coverage.
- There is cap on funding for the TANF program. DSHS is required to take specific corrective action if they exceed appropriated funding levels.

Substitute Senate Bill 5677 contains several effective dates, please refer to the bill for specific information in this regard.